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C O R R E C T E D C O P Y (TEXT)

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [OREP](#) [IR](#) [IS](#) [RS](#)
SUBJECT: RUSSIAN ANALYSTS URGE U.S. NOT TO LET GEORGIA
OVERSHADOW IRAN COOPERATION

REF: MOSCOW 2824

¶1. (SBU) Summary: During an October 13 roundtable attended by HFAC Chairman Howard Berman and HFAC staff, analysts argued that Russians perceived NATO expansion as more of a threat than a nuclear Iran, which was not viewed by the political leadership as a "vital issue" for Russia. They warned against allowing current tensions, particularly over Georgia, to prevent the U.S. and Russia from cooperating on Iran, which did pose a threat to stability in the Middle East, and advised the U.S. to find areas to achieve "positive progress" in bilateral relations with Russia. The analysts thought that Moscow would not support new sanctions against Tehran, and recommended making economic sanctions more effective by convincing Europe, China, and Japan to stop conducting business with Iran. They urged the U.S. to head off a potential Israeli attack on Iran, which Russia would use to criticize and blame the U.S. The analysts concluded that the P5 1 format had proven ineffective by allowing Iran to delay negotiations, and advocated adopting the format used in the North Korea Six Party Talks. End summary.

NATO is the Threat, Not Iran

¶2. (SBU) At an October 13 roundtable focusing on Iran, Sergei Oznobishchev, Director of the Institute for Strategic Assessments, argued that many Russians, including political and military leaders, saw NATO expanding into Ukraine as a greater concern to Russia than the prospect of a nuclear Iran. While the assembled analysts recognized that NATO did not pose a threat to Russia, Oznobishchev advised "do not look for logic" on this issue from the Russian leadership. Instead, accept that they believe what they say and react accordingly.

¶3. (SBU) Oznobishchev warned against allowing current international tensions to compromise cooperation on Iran, stating that the U.S. "will never stop Iran" from developing nuclear weapons without Russia. He observed that the anti-American sentiment that resulted from the Georgian crisis had led some Russians to sympathize more with Iran, which Tehran was hoping to capitalize on. This did not mean that Moscow would be influenced by Tehran's lobbyists, who were attempting to change Russian policies toward Iran and proposed expanding military ties (reftel).

¶4. (SBU) Oznobishchev argued that heightened tensions between the U.S. and Russia over Georgia were only a symptom of the larger issue of Russia's concern that its views on NATO and European security were regularly ignored. From Moscow's perspective, the manner in which NATO expansion had been carried out made it appear that incorporating Romania and Bulgaria into the alliance was more important to the U.S. than its relationship with Russia. Oznobishchev urged the

U.S. to consider the impact its policies had on the ability to address issues such as Iran. He envisioned a "package agreement" in which NATO would not expand to Ukraine and Russia would commit to pressing harder on Iran. At the very least, the U.S. should look for opportunities for "positive progress" in bilateral relations, including on arms control agreements such as START and passing the U.S.-Russia 123 Agreement.

Iran is not a "Vital Issue" for Russia

15. (SBU) Aleksandr Shumilin of the U.S. and Canada Institute observed that Iran was not considered a "vital issue" for much of the Russian political leadership, which viewed the country more as an element of the U.S.-Russia relationship. While the analysts agreed that Iran posed a threat to stability in the Middle East, Shumilin said that many members of the Russian elite did not recognize it as such, and considered Russia-Iran bilateral relations secondary to the opportunity Iran presented Russia to play an important diplomatic role. Vladimir Evseev of the Institute of Global Economy and International Affairs (IMEMO) observed that the U.S. and Russia had "different redlines" regarding Iran. For the GOR, Tehran would not pass a redline as long as it continued working with the IAEA, which Moscow thought made it difficult for Iran to produce enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon.

More Work Needed on Economic Sanctions

16. (SBU) The analysts agreed that Russia would not countenance new sanctions on Iran, and thought the best way to press Tehran with the means at hand was to make economic sanctions effective. Vladimir Sazhin of the Oriental Studies Institute commented that other countries, including Germany and Italy, had more developed economic and trade relationships with Iran than did Russia, and it would be important to get these countries onboard for sanctions to work. He advised the U.S. to have "conversations" with Europe, Japan and China, all of which continued doing business with Iran, if it was serious about making economic sanctions effective. Steps would also have to be taken against companies and banks in the Persian Gulf states and Malaysia that had relationships with Iranian entities.

Russia Would Blame U.S. for Israeli Attack on Iran

17. (SBU) The analysts thought the possibility of an Israeli attack on Iranian nuclear sites was real and urged the U.S. to do what was necessary to prevent this from occurring. Putin would blame the U.S. for not preventing Israel from destabilizing the Middle East, and Russians would argue that the U.S. gave Israel a "green light" as some believed it did for Georgia to attack South Ossetia.

Adopt Six Party Format for Iran

18. (SBU) Evseev argued that the P5 1 process did not work and recommended adopting the negotiating format used for the Six Party Talks with North Korea. The current format, which did not have Iran sitting with the other parties and required regular passing of offers and counter offers, allowed Iran to delay the negotiating process. Having Iran at the same table, as North Korea was, would make it harder for Tehran to avoid responding to the demands of the international community.

19. (U) The delegation has cleared this cable.
BEYRLE